

***Astragalus riparius* Barneby**

Piper's milk vetch
Fabaceae (Pea Family)

Status: State Endangered

Rank: G1G2S1S2

General Description: Erect perennial, grayish-green to greenish in color; stems tufted, 1½-6 inches (4-15 cm) long; leaves compound, pea-like, 21-33 leaflets, oblong, glabrous above, stipules clasping the stem below; 10-20 racemes on long peduncles extending above the leaves; flowers greenish-white and drying to yellowish-white, the upper petal curved back and having an irregular margin; ovary and pod sessile, glabrous, oblong, erect, broadly rounded at the base and contracted to a sharp beak at the tip, with a single compartment, wings 1/32-¼ inches (1-4 mm), banner abruptly recurved.

Identification Tips: *Astragalus riparius* is most closely related to *A. reventus*. These species can be distinguished by their petals and pods. The wing petals of *A. riparius* are 1 to 4 mm longer than the banner and its pods are hairless. The wing petals of *A. reventus* are shorter than the banner, and its pods are covered with short, soft trichomes.

Phenology: Flowering in May and June, fruits persisting through fall and winter.

Range: Regionally endemic and locally plentiful along the Lower Snake River and its tributaries between the mouth of the Clear Water and that of the Tucannon River. Scattered in Asotin, Whitman and Columbia counties, Washington. Historically found in Idaho.

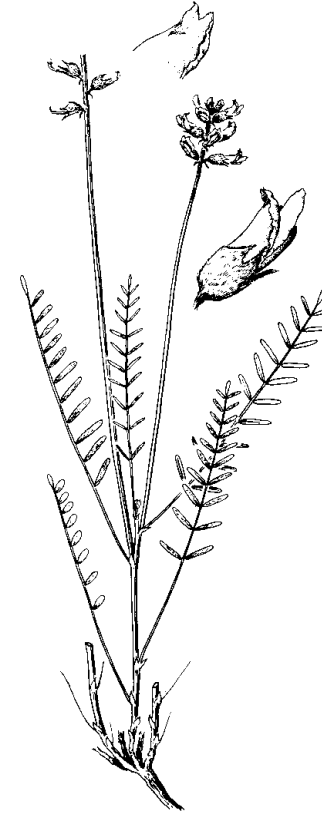
Habitat: Dry bluffs, canyon banks and prairies. Associated species include blue bunch wheat grass (*Agropyron spicatum*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), big-leaf lupine (*Lupinus polyphyllus*), and yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*).

Ecology: This species combines characteristics of *A. reventus* and *A. palousensis* and may have originated as a hybrid population, but it has now established itself and is a self-perpetuating species.

State Status Comments: *Astragalus riparius* is no longer abundant as reported in Hitchcock *et. al.* (1961). The limited range of *A. riparius* is the primary factor responsible for the sensitive status of the taxon.

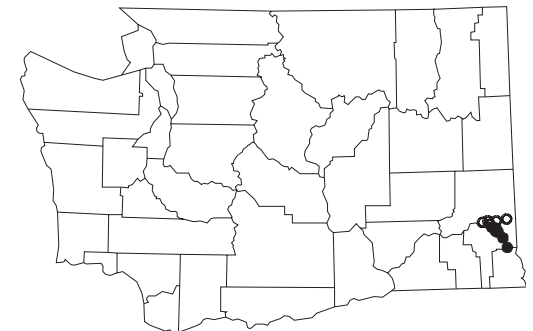
Astragalus riparius

Piper's milk vetch



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Known distribution of
Astragalus riparius
in Washington



Astragalus riparius

Piper's milk vetch



Washington Natural Heritage Program photo



Washington Natural Heritage Program photo

Astragalus riparius

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Inventory Needs: Additional inventory and information on the distribution of *A. riparius* is needed. Studies addressing the biology of the taxon would be an asset.

Threats and Management Concerns: Grazing, agricultural expansion, dam construction, flooding, and timber harvest.

References:

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, J.W. Thompson. 1961. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest Part 3: Saxifragaceae to Ericaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 614 pp.

Hitchcock, C. L. and A. Cronquist. 1973. *Flora of the Pacific Northwest*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 730 pp.